



# CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Richfield, Minnesota

## Joint City Council and Transportation Commission Work Session

### October 11, 2022

<b>CALL TO ORDER</b>
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Mayor Regan Gonzalez called the work session to order at 5:48 p.m. in the Bartholomew Room.

*Council Members Present:* Maria Regan Gonzalez, Mayor; Simon Trautmann; Mary Supple; Ben Whalen and Sean Hayford O'leary

*Transportation Commission Members Present:* Husniyah Bradley, Chair; David Gepner, Jim Mahoney, Kyle Schmidt; Dan Edgerton

*Transportation Commission Members Absent:* Mollie O'Howard, Jeffrey Walz, Louis Dzierzak

*Staff Present:* Katie Rodriguez, City Manager; Kristin Asher, Public Works Director; Chris Link, Deputy Public Works Director; Joe Powers, City Engineer; Ben Manibog, Transportation Engineer; Scott Kulzer, Administrative Aide/Analyst; Jay Henthorne, Public Safety Director/Police Chief; and Chris Swanson, Management Analyst.

*Others Present:* Jan Matheus, Bike Advocates Liaison; Kevin Wendt, Community Services Commission Liaison

<b>ITEM #1</b>	<b>OVERVIEW OF THE EMERALD ASH BORER (EAB) REMOVAL ASSISTANCE ARPA PROGRAM AND SEEK DIRECTION FROM THE CITY COUNCIL ON CERTAIN PROGRAM DETAILS</b>
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City Manager Rodriguez introduced the topic and turned over the presentation to Public Works Director Asher. Director Asher introduced the topic and asked for guidance from the City Council on the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Removal Assistance program funded by American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

Director Asher turned the presentation over to Deputy Public Works Director Link and Administrative Aide/Analyst Kulzer. Analyst Kulzer provided an overview on the proposed EAB program including who would qualify for the funding and stated that staff is looking final input for council on a few parts of the EAB program.

Analyst Kulzer provided a summary on EAB in Richfield and highlighted the main questions staff had for City Council. These included staff capacity, the number of residents served, various cost share scenarios, and if there be a cap on how much the city provides to resident. Additionally, Analyst

Kulzer asked if Council believes we should open funding retroactively to assist the homeowners who had trees removed this year and if the city should require replacement trees to qualify for EAB funding. Analyst Kulzer then turned over the presentation to Deputy Public Works Director Link for additional comments on the proposed EAB program. Deputy Director Link went over pricing mechanisms for trees and detailed how the cost of removal can escalate quickly depending on the number of trees removed.

Council Member Hayford Oleary asked how many residents would have been eligible to receive funding if this EAB grant was offered in 2022. Deputy Director Link stated he was not sure how many would have met this requirement, as we don't know the income of the household who did have trees removed this year. Council Member Hayford Oleary recognized there are residents who have already paid for having trees removed. He was supportive of their decision, but does not feel that retroactively allowing these folks to apply for this new funding would further the city's goals of addressing EAB in Richfield.

Council Member Trautmann stated he had similar concerns as those mentioned by Council Member Hayford Oleary. He also shared concerns about placing a cap on payments and noted that many families already shoulder the burden disproportionately as their finances are capped by their income. He supported the staff recommendation to allow residents to retroactively apply for the new EAB funding.

Council Member Supple wondered what would happen if there were more applications than funding available. Deputy Director Link stated this program is first come first serve, but would also target specific areas of our communities identified in our equity toolkit. Analyst Kulzer mentioned city wide promotions along with targeted mailing to areas identified in the equity toolkit.

Council Member Whalen said he is worried about not having a cap because he doesn't want all the funds used by a small number of projects. That said, he also recognized that removing multiple trees from one property increases the costs but providing funding to community members in that case is ultimately a good use of these EAB funds. Council Member Whalen had a question on requiring replacement trees. He initially wanted to require replacement trees, but recognizes the additional staff time this would require. He would be interested in looking for ways the city can nudge residents to purchase replacement trees. Deputy Director Link stated we're limited by what we can purchase with an assessment. As it stands, state law on tree assessments only allow the city to cover the cost for a removal of a diseased trees. State law does not allow an assessment to cover the cost for a replacement tree. Council Member Whalen asked if, by structuring the EAB program as we have, we could support residents in at least assisting with the cost for the removal of the tree, and that, by providing that funding, the city is functionally providing the resident some money that could be used to purchase a tree. Deputy Director Link stated this is correct and the assessment process allows residents a full year to pay before the charge is placed on property taxes. He noted that just because a family participates in the program the tree abatement charge may not be assessed. Council Member Whalen thanked staff for the clarification statements and said he would be comfortable with staff proposals included in the report.

Council Member Supple agreed with the recommendations but would like staff to work to identify way to encourage residents to plant a wide variety of replacement trees.

Mayor Regan Gonzalez stated she is comfortable with most of the items proposed. She did still have a larger question on if the funds should retroactively be available to residents who had trees removed this year. She would like to hear more from council on this matter.

Council Member Hayford Oleary said he agrees with the Mayor and does not support allowing residents to retroactively apply for these funds.

Council Member Whalen felt that by allowing residents to retroactively apply for these funds, we would be not helping the most proactive people. He shared concerns about what would happen if not enough people apply and the city has remaining funds.

Council Member Supple supports allowing residents to apply for this funding retroactively as long as they follow the income requirements proposed by staff.

Council Member Hayford Oleary felt this may water down the impact the ARPA funds may have as few residents will be incentivized to remove more diseased Ash trees. Deputy Director Link stated this was the same discussion they had in their office. He said that staff ultimately decided they should allow residents to retroactively apply for funding as this is the most equitable approach.

Council Member Trautmann said he really doesn't have any strong thoughts on the matter.

Mayor Regan Gonzalez said she really could go either way on this question.

Council Member Hayford Oleary said Deputy Director Link's summary of their thought process on this matter makes sense and would support the staff recommendations.

Deputy Director Link thanked council for their input and provided a summary of the council's direction on the EAB funding program.

<b>ITEM #2</b>	<b>OVERVIEW OF LOCAL SPEED LIMITS, STAFF'S ONGOING SPEED LIMIT STUDY, POSSIBLE OPTIONS THE CITY CAN PROCEED WITH, AND A STAFF RECOMMENDATION FOR DISCUSSION</b>
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Mayor Regan Gonzalez introduced the topic for discussion for the work session and turned it over to Public Works Director Asher who passed the work session to Transportation Engineer Manibog. Engineer Manibog introduced the topic of discussion and went over the current speed limit environment in the state which outlined the state statute that dictates speed limits and the current limits in Richfield. Engineer Manibog went over what methods a number of other cities have in place for setting speed limits within their borders and the historical data on motor vehicle crashes in our city.

Council Member Supple asked if we can assume the reductions in crashes seen in recent years are from less driving during the pandemic or other factors like intentional traffic slowing design. Engineer Manibog said we cannot specifically identify what is causing this decrease but that we already saw this trend occurring before the pandemic. He stated we expect to continue to see these traffic statistics trend in the right direction in the future.

Engineer Manibog went over current speed data for the city collected by Public Works and Public Safety; the data shows that most drivers are driving below the speed limit. Engineer Manibog showed a map of where speed studies have been performed in our city. He noted these studies tended to trend to our white neighborhoods. Historically, speed studies have been performed at the request of the community.

Council Member Trautmann talked about how it's troubling to see the high number of serious injuries from traffic accidents we're experiencing in our city. He asked if staff had any thoughts on why we were seeing higher injuries from traffic accidents in Richfield. Engineer Manibog said many of these crashes are happening on county roads where there are higher allowed speeds.

Transportation Commission Chair Bradley said it would be good to know where these serious crashes are happening so we can work to reduce the trend. Engineer Manibog said he can get that data and will bring to the next meeting.

Council Member Whalen stated he suspects the majority of dangerous crashes are individuals not traveling the speed limit. He said he would like to talk at a later date about how we can do more to discourage individuals from speeding in the first place. He said he would like to know what additional actions we can take to get people to follow the posted speed limits. Engineer Manibog thanked council for those comments. He noted that speed limits are just one part of our toolbox we can use to

reduce these serious accidents. He also noted that cities have only been allowed to make these city specific speed changes since 2019.

Transportation Commissioner Gepner asked if this was an exercise in futility and asked for the thoughts of Police Chief Henthorne. Chief Henthorne responded that although we're still seeing speeders in Richfield it's not as many as there were a few years ago. He mentioned the Richfield Police Department receives complaints on speeding in neighborhoods, but the trend is mostly on the larger county roads.

Engineer Manibog went through the staff recommendations. The recommendations include a default 25 speed limit across the city, with higher speed limits on specific roads. Engineer Manibog noted that, with the staff recommendations, we still end up with higher speeds in more traditionally diverse neighborhoods, but we can continue to look at traffic calming items for areas in the future. He also went over how we are able to build flexibility built into these recommendations.

Transportation Commissioner Mahoney said he was interested in where serious crashes were happening. He wondered if the Council and Commission could get more information on these accidents. He was not sure if speed was the main issue with these incidents and was wondering if other calming measures may reduce the number of accidents in the city.

Council Member Hayford Oleary thanked staff for the presentation and said he feels the speed currently proposed by staff, 25 mph, is too high. He worried about the safety on roads that may be approved for higher speeds; look at what speeds are appropriate for the community and not what speeds residents are currently driving. Council Member Hayford Oleary showed a "20 is plenty" sign from Minneapolis and discussed how these slower speeds are much less dangerous to pedestrians. He asked staff for their reasoning behind the proposed 25 mph speed limit. Engineer Manibog talked about how our streets are generally wider and how there is a lot less on-street parking compared to other cities. Council Member Hayford Oleary agreed with these points, but shared that it's important to set a goal and that 77<sup>th</sup> Street should be set at the same speed as other main through roads.

Council Member Whalen acknowledged the difference between 20 and 25 mph and would push for a lower speed across the city. He stated that there are accessible roads people can use if they want to go faster. He shared a few specific areas he would like to adjust the standard speeds based on his own use of the roads and what he has heard from residents.

Commissioner Gepner wondered about adding more stop signs in residential areas to slow speeds.

Council Member Trautmann went over some specific areas that have a high concentration of pedestrians that are seniors and/or individuals with disabilities and shared that the lower speed limit is good for teenagers who are just learning to drive. Council Member Trautmann asked Chief Henthorne about the proposed speeds and if this change would overwhelm the police force. Chief Henthorne shared that Saint Louis Park did see some increase in enforcement and education when the speeds were dropped and that the Richfield Police Department would need to prepare for this additional work if these changes were adopted.

Transportation Commissioner Edgerton said some of the proposed speeds still seemed fast. He discussed how the time saved driving through the city in one of these faster speed zones is less than a minute, yet the mortality is significantly raised if there is a crash.

Council Member Supple agreed the city shouldn't not set limits based on the speeds community members are currently driving and the limits should be set to what speed we want people to be driving on these roads. She also agreed that even the proposed higher speed limits should be reduced as they would be safer.

Chair Bradley asked if there's data on who was stopped for speeding, what speed where they going, where were they located. She wanted to know if there were any disparities in enforcement in the data. She also asked if there were any traffic calming mechanisms projects pending and if there is

funding currently budgeted for this work. Engineer Manibog said the disparity information is not collected at the state level and that there is some funding already in the CIP.

Mayor Regan Gonzalez spoke about her support for exploring a 20 mph limit. She thanked staff for including the racial equity overlay in the presentations and encouraged all departments to include this information in future presentations. She said she would like to get more info on serious crashes and what other factors may be involved and to see mitigations plans, including traffic calming items, for areas that have a high number of these crashes.

Council Member Hayford Oleary thanked the other council members and commissioners for supporting lowering the default speed to 20 mph, but he would also support the limit for larger roads being 25 mph. He asked if Council Member Whalen would be comfortable with this proposed change. Council Member Whalen said he wasn't comfortable with going to 25 mph as people tend to drive around the speed limit, that could mean individuals driving upwards of 25 mph. He also stated that if we were to look at more enforcement, we should be not creating a more inequitable environment.

Council Member Trautmann noted that 77th Street is not a county road so we can control the speed limit on this road.

Commissioner Mahoney discussed that 25 mph is the average as half are driving slower but half are driving higher and that many drive slower as that is what they feel the roads are designed for.

Engineer Manibog provided a brief summary of next steps. From his notes, those present are generally interested in lowering the default speed to 20 mph for the city and evaluate if the higher proposed speeds are necessary. The attendees would like to see more data on what may be causing the elevated number of crashes which result in serious injury and there were also a number of street specific comments that staff will review.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Regan Gonzalez adjourned the work session at 6:56 p.m.

Date Approved: October 25, 2022



Chris Swanson  
Management Analyst



Maria Regan Gonzalez  
Mayor



Katie Rodriguez  
City Manager